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DE RUEHJA #3468/01 3610621
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 270621Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7500
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4605
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1814
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3602
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1359
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2196
RUEHBAD/AMCONSUL PERTH 0503
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 003468

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, DRL, DRL/IRF
INR FOR CHARLIE ZENZIE
NSC FOR EPHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/27/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: CHRISTMAS IN INDONESIA -- AMID TIGHT SECURITY,
INTERFAITH TOLERANCE

REF: A. JAKARTA 003464

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 003442

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: At the direct order of the President, Indonesian police made an impressive show of force to bolster security at churches across Indonesia during the Christmas season. No incidents of violence were reported. In public events in this Muslim majority but diverse country, politicians and Muslim leaders reinforced messages of peace, tolerance, and interfaith harmony. END SUMMARY.

POLICE OUT IN FORCE

[1](#)2. (C) Christmas in Indonesia went quietly. In what has become a Christmas tradition in Indonesia (since bombings targeted churches in 2000), the Indonesian National Police (INP) dramatically increased December deployments, staging more than 141,000 personnel around the country to protect churches, and other possible targets of terrorist attacks and violence. In Jakarta alone, the INP deployed thousands of officers with only one bomb hoax reported on Christmas Eve. The INP paid special attention to potential conflict areas, particularly Central Sulawesi province, where some 5,000 officers were stationed to guard approximately 350 churches. In the event, no incidents of extremist violence were reported.

CHRISTIANS PLEASED

[1](#)3. (SBU) Leaders of Christian churches and associations reported good cooperation among churches, the INP, and volunteers from Muslim organizations who provided additional security assistance. (Note: Approximately 10-12 percent of Indonesians are Christian.) The Secretary General of the Indonesian Conference of Bishops reported that each Catholic church had a security committee which coordinated with police and other volunteers. Nahdlatul Ulama's paramilitary wing, Banser, also continued its practice of sending members to provide additional security for churches and says it sent 5,000 members to churches around the country.

¶4. (C) One Catholic Church official told us that he was "very impressed with efforts to protect religious observance; we are very thankful that President Yudhoyono was personally involved." (Note: President Yudhoyono made clear that he was directing the effort to ensure a secure Christmas, meeting with senior security officials and publicizing his wish for a peaceful holiday timeframe.)

THE ACCENT IS ON TOLERANCE

¶5. (SBU) National and local political leaders were eager to help foster a spirit of tolerance and harmony. National Legislature (DPR) Speaker Agung Laksono's wife, a Christian, and son hosted a Christmas dinner on December 26 (the Speaker is a Muslim). Jakarta Governor Fauzi Bowo, a Muslim, made public visits to several prominent Jakarta churches, reinforcing the message of tolerance and encouraging a community-wide approach to security. President Yudhoyono and the Department of Religion are hosting a "National Christmas Celebration" the evening of December 27 at the Jakarta Convention Center.

¶6. (SBU) Indonesian Muslim leaders offered signs of friendship by reaching out to the country's Christian population. Masdar Farid Mas'udi, a member of Nahdlatul Ulama's executive board and longtime defender of pluralism, delivered the most pronounced message of friendship to Indonesian Christians by wishing them a "Merry Christmas," a gesture that the hard-line Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) has declared forbidden for observant Muslims. Muhammadiyah leader Din Syamsuddin did not go quite as far, but did issue a statement emphasizing that religious differences should not lead to conflict.

¶7. (U) On an international note, Nasaruddin Umar, a high

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level executive in Nahdlatul Ulama, joined 130 Muslim scholars from across the Islamic world in issuing a Christmas message of peace and friendship as part of "A Common Word," a group of Muslim intellectuals that initially organized in 2006 to participate in interfaith dialogues with Pope Benedict XVI.

STILL SOME PROBLEMS

¶8. (C) Signs of interfaith harmony at Christmas show the strong sense of community that usually prevails among Indonesia's officially recognized religions--Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Such signs of harmony among religions run counter to the discord that at times can strike the Muslim community over differences in theological opinion, such as the recent attacks on minority, allegedly heretical Muslim sects (reftels). Nevertheless, based on this Christmas season, the sometimes troubled Indonesian Christian and Muslim relationship appears poised to start 2008 on relatively sound footing.

HUME